

## **Conclusions of the Clean Air Dialogue between Slovakia and the European Commission, taking place in Bratislava on 24-25 April 2018.**

Despite significant decrease since 1990 Slovakia is still challenged by high levels of air pollution being emitted and air quality with a high impact on health, nature and economy. Estimates point to around 5,000 premature deaths attributable to air pollution each year in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. Estimates also point to health-related external costs from air pollution in Slovakia are above EUR 3 billion/year. These direct economic costs relate to 1.3 million workdays lost each year due to sickness related to air pollution, with associated costs for employers of EUR 123 million/year, for healthcare of above EUR 10 million/year, and for agriculture (crop losses) of EUR 25 million/year.<sup>2</sup>

Commitment to clean air policy is therefore important and necessary, and will also contribute to the European Union's objectives to achieve levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on, and risk to, human health and the environment<sup>3</sup>, and move closer to levels recommended by the World Health Organization.

This Clean Air Dialogue has proven valuable in promoting a more detailed understanding of the approach to clean air policy in Slovakia, through its specific national policies and measures. The Dialogue facilitated an informal and open exchange of views with relevant ministries and stakeholders, on the successes and future challenges facing clean air policy in Slovakia and the inter-linkages with policies on agriculture, industry, transport, energy and climate change. It also provided insights on options for enhancing the efforts in Slovakia, based on wider experiences, including from other Member States, which can be facilitated notably by the Peer-to-Peer tool under the Environment Implementation Review of the European Commission. The Dialogue was also an opportunity to designate starting blocks for the new National Air Pollution Control Programme under the NEC directive.

The Clean Air Dialogue with Slovakia concludes that:

### **1. Better air quality monitoring and assessment**

Objective, comparable and reliable emission and air quality data is at the heart of being able to successfully engage stakeholders, manage air quality and achieve clean air. The European Commission had in 2017 raised concerns about deficiencies in the monitoring network maintained by Slovakia. Since then significant efforts have been made by the Slovakian authorities to improve the monitoring network.

Slovakia is committed to have completed its upgrade of the monitoring network by the end of 2019. A total of EUR 25 million have been allocated to this exercise, and will include improvements in the inventories of air pollutant emissions, air quality modelling as well as more and better quality fixed air quality measurements. As part of this an additional 14

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2017>

<sup>2</sup> The EU Environmental Implementation Review Country Report – SLOVAKIA (COM(2017)63)

<sup>3</sup> [7th Environment Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'](#)

sampling points will be added to the monitoring network. The Commission considers these improvements urgent and advises an accelerated implementation.

## **2. Emissions from residential solid fuel combustion**

Residential solid fuel combustion is the dominant source of particulate matter in Slovakia, and a main contributor to the reported exceedances of the EU air quality limit value for particulate matter (PM10) and the EU target value for Benzo(a)Pyrene (BaP) in ambient air.

Emission inventories and projections will need to be improved in the near future for all relevant data (*inter alia* biomass consumption and the structure of the equipment in households). Based on the improved inventory and projection of particle emissions also for the residential sector, there is an urgent need for planning further actions that can reduce the emissions. The challenges to meet the reduction commitments in 2020 and 2030 in accordance with the NEC Directive will require that actions at many levels are being analysed – and decided as appropriate - such as:

- Raising public awareness on health impact of residential solid fuel combustion and clean operation techniques in private households, e.g. connected to public awareness activities on energy saving.
- Incentives to accelerate scrapping of sub-standard solid fuel stoves and boilers.
- Incentives to promote systematic transfer to cleaner heating sources.
- Fuel quality requirements to solid fuels used in households, and related market surveillance.

Reducing air pollution from the residential sector is very closely connected to policies on renovation of buildings and energy installations, promotion of renewable energy, while taking due account of nature protection, and transition to a low-carbon economy, as well as eradication of energy poverty. It would therefore be relevant for Slovakia to further include also air quality efforts in other relevant policies, to enhance actions by utilising synergies and co-benefits.

The development of a National Air Pollution Control Programme by April 2019 will be a relevant milestone for Slovakia to set coordinated directions for policies and actions on air quality, renewable energy, energy renovation and eradication of energy poverty. Such efforts can also enhance the effective uptake of available EU funding e.g. the Structural Funds, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the LIFE programme.

It will also be relevant to draw on experience from other Member States, such as the measures developed and used under the LIFE project in Małopolska (Poland), also as inspiration for cooperation with local authorities.

## **3. Emissions from transport**

The amount of traffic and the age of cars are a main source of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter in the major cities in Slovakia, and a contributor to the reported exceedances of EU limit values for particulate matter. It is necessary for Slovakia to initialise firm actions on short and long sight to reduce emissions from the current and future fleet of cars.

Achieving the potential effects of current legislation, allowing cities to establish Low Emission Zones, will need close attention and guidance from the Government side, also for effective integration of Low Emissions Zones in transport and urban planning.

The current scheme to promote the sale of electric vehicles should be complemented by further tools to promote electric mobility in the cities, included recharging infrastructure, delivering on both climate and air pollution.

A mixture of policies utilised by other Member States should be considered in Slovakia, looking at - for example - green public procurement; incentives for retrofitting of diesel particulate filters – possibly linked to low emission zones; fuel and vehicle taxation to promote cleaner cars and the modernisation of the current fleet; incentives to promote public transportation; etc.

Measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve urban mobility and transport management (like charges), will often also reduce air pollution. It is therefore relevant to use policies in these areas as drivers also for air quality improvements. Pursuing such synergies will also enhance an effective uptake of available national and EU funding for reduction of air pollution from transport.

#### **4. Emissions from agriculture**

Current activity and possible future growth in the agricultural sector in Slovakia might challenge the needed reduction path for ammonia and will need close attention. The National Air Pollution Control Programme will be an opportunity to demonstrate the capability to combine modernisation and growth of the agriculture sector with a cost effective pathway for reducing ammonia emissions.

It is relevant for Slovakia to promote measures that reduces ammonia emissions, as for example the use of near-ground spreading techniques that also can generate economic benefits for the farmers, beyond health and environmental ones. There is an urgent need for the development of ammonia mitigation scenarios, based on an improved emission inventory and projections, as a starting point for dialogue with the sector as well as integration into agricultural and funding policies of Slovakia.

Vast experiences are available from other Member States on regulations and mitigation techniques that would be useful for Slovakia to consider and take inspiration from. It is positive that Slovakia has taken the lead in organising a workshop with funding from Peer-to-Peer tool of the European Commission, for transfer of experiences between Member States on mitigation of ammonia.

Measures to reduce ammonia are closely linked to efforts to reduce nitrates and greenhouse gases from the agricultural sector. Synergies and co-benefits should therefore as far as possible be promoted, also having in mind that measures reducing nitrogen to the air can in some cases result in increased nitrogen to the aquatic environment and vice-versa, which should be avoided.

#### **5. Emissions from industry**

Industry and power generation are the second largest sources of particulate matter emitted in Slovakia and a major regional emitter of sulphur – affecting human health and nature.

Future development of the emissions is directly linked to the implementation of the Industrial Emissions Directive and in particular the conclusions on Best Available Techniques (BAT) for large combustion plants adopted in August 2017, as well as the ambition of the Energy Union.

The National Air Pollution Control Programme will have to incorporate decisions on the directions of the energy production in Slovakia, not least the future use of coal, which is also being supported by the EU platform on Coal Regions in Transition and the existing EU funding for economic, social and environmental purposes.

#### **6. Effective uptake of available EU funding**

The Commission encourages Slovakia to make full use of the available EU funding mechanisms also to support the air quality and emission reduction objectives in national Air Quality Plans and the National Air Pollution Control Programme. Although the primary objectives might not be the reduction of air pollutions, the objectives of the Rural

Development Programme, the Operational Programmes under the Structural Funds, the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport, and more, can also cover actions that benefit clean air. For future use of EU funding, Slovakia could consider priority axes and investment priorities that include air quality.

Integrated Projects under the LIFE programme are relevant for the development of national or regional plans, programmes and strategies also in Slovakia.

## **7. Good Governance**

Good governance, including stakeholder involvement, is essential to effective clean air policy formulation, so as to maximise the co-benefits of action in other areas including in transport, energy, climate change and agriculture; and to increase public acceptance of necessary transitions and trade-offs. Societal adjustments will be more effectively achieved when close coordination of policies and co-benefits is being pursued.

Slovakia have positively embarked in a very open and transparent process for the preparation of the National Air Pollution Control Programme as well as national air quality strategy that are key to ensure effective implementation of mitigation measures.

Further efforts seems relevant for a more close involvement of local authorities and for information to the general public.

To deliver changes on the ground and maximise the potential of existing legislation, efforts should continue to be made, to ensure effective and transparent implementation and enforcement.